

Social and Emotional Learning

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BACKGROUND AND DEVELOPMENT

High-stakes tests. Substance abuse. Suicide. Academic standards. Delinquency. Media and technology. Teacher retention. Interpersonal violence. Dropouts. Changes in families. The list of issues facing today's educators and students is daunting. But genuinely effective schools—those that prepare students not only to pass tests at school but also to pass the tests of life—are finding that social-emotional competence and academic achievement are interwoven and that integrated, coordinated instruction in both areas maximizes students' potential to succeed in school and throughout their lives. Schools are now seen as “an important if not central arena for health promotion [and] primary prevention . . . in addition to the education of students” (Roeser, Eccles, & Samoroff, 2000, p. 467). These findings are not surprising, as shown in the work of Wang, Haertel, and Walberg (1997). They examined 28 categories of influences on learning, which they based on reviews of 179 handbook chapters, 91 research syntheses, and surveys of 61 national experts. Wang et al. found that 8 of the 11 most influential categories involved social and emotional factors (e.g., student-teacher social interactions, classroom climate, and peer group). Further, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (2002), among the major reasons cited for dropping out of school several involve social and emotional factors: not getting along with teachers or peers (35.0% and 20.1%, respectively), feeling left out (23.2%), and not feeling safe (12.1%). Thus, it is understandable that Wang et al. concluded that “direct intervention in the psychological determinants of learning promises the

most effective avenues of reform” (p. 210), which supports providing social and emotional learning in schools.

Social and Emotional Learning Defined

In simple terms, social and emotional learning (SEL) is the capacity to recognize and manage emotions, solve problems effectively, and establish positive relationships with others, competencies that clearly are essential for all students. Thus, SEL targets a combination of behaviors, cognitions, and emotions. As described by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), SEL is the process of acquiring and effectively applying the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to recognize and manage emotions; developing caring and concern for others; making responsible decisions; establishing positive relationships; and handling challenging situations capably. Similar to the way students learn academic skills, they learn, practice, and apply SEL skills by engaging in positive activities in and out of the classroom. Initial skills that they have learned become enhanced, nuanced, and better integrated over time to address the increasingly complex situations children face in terms of academics, social relationships, citizenship, and health (Elias et al., 1997; Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2003).

SEL largely evolved from research on prevention and resilience (see Consortium on the School-Based Promotion of Social Competence, 1994), and interest in SEL sparked in the mid-1990s with the publication of Goleman's *Emotional Intelligence* (1995) and Gardner's *Multiple Intelligences* (1993). A high level of interest

continues today, with research showing an increasing number of positive outcomes of SEL, and states and school districts adopting requirements for teaching SEL. Indeed, growing numbers of educators and parents recognize the relationships between academic and social-emotional learning, particularly within the context of schools' systems of support.

Systems of Support

Instruction in SEL is provided in the context of caring, safe, well-managed, and participatory classroom, school, and other learning environments. These learned skills are then reinforced in the school, home, and community. All children might benefit from social-emotional instruction, including those who are at risk, those beginning to engage in negative behaviors, and those already displaying significant problems. The focus of most SEL programs is universal prevention and promotion—that is, preventing behavior problems by promoting social and emotional competence—rather than direct intervention. Smaller numbers of students may require moderate to intensive treatment that focuses on social-emotional competence, but SEL programming is intended to enhance the growth of all children, to help them develop healthy behaviors, and to prevent their engaging in maladaptive and unhealthy behaviors.

Such efforts should be viewed within the context of systems of support that provide a comprehensive continuum of services based on student needs. The continuum involves three system levels that support the academic and social-emotional development of all students. A diagram illustrating these relationships is shown in Figure 1, which closely parallels the conceptual framework of Adelman and Taylor (2000). The different sizes of the circles represent numbers of children served by each system, the overlapping signifies the interrelationships among the three systems, and the bottom box indicates that school-family-community partnerships are the foundation for promoting the development of all students. Additionally, the costs associated with providing the necessary support at each level are spread out across many students at the prevention and promotion level, which results in a relatively small cost per student; however, the costs rise as the intensity of the support increases. Hence, the cost per student is much higher for early intervention and treatment, particularly for the latter.

As a system of support, SEL is a unifying concept for organizing, coordinating, and integrating school-based

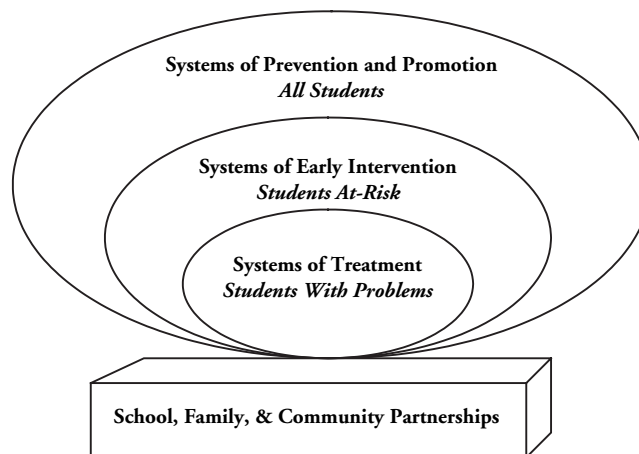


Figure 1. *Integrated and coordinated systems to support the development of all children.*

prevention and promotion programs that minimizes fragmentation and reduces marginalization of these efforts. The most effective, sustained approaches involve students, parents, educators, and community members as partners in planning, implementing, and evaluating SEL efforts. Systematic social and emotional education begins in preschool, continues through high school, is intentionally linked to academics, and is an integral component of the school curriculum (Elias et al., 1997; CASEL, 2003).

PROBLEMS AND IMPLICATIONS

In today's society, children face countless situations that can have a negative effect on their social-emotional and academic development and ultimately on their happiness in life. For example, the United States arguably is more deeply divided and confused today than it has been since the civil rights and Vietnam War eras, as we grapple with issues such as preemptive war, civil liberties, and personal freedoms versus national security, abortion, the definition of marriage, affirmative action, and immigration. Inequities between the richest and poorest households continue to widen and are the widest since these data were first recorded in the 1960s (Wollman et al., 2003). In the past, menaces to world peace were well-known; now they may be anonymous, fanatical terrorists who don't discriminate between soldiers and civilians, who hide within the general populace, and who might be the person sitting next to you on a plane or walking by you at the mall, which can lead to a generalized sense of insecurity and fear.

Fifty years ago social institutions and political leaders were highly respected and influential. Children did not pick up the morning paper to learn about sexual abuse by religious leaders or the lurid details of the president's marital indiscretions. The evening television news was not filled with stories of business executives and cultural icons being sent to prison because of their unethical, illegal behavior that betrayed and harmed the future of thousands of their employees and investors; allegations of their sexual relationships with young children; and charges of rape and murder.

Previous generations of parents did not have to be Internet savvy. "Dangerous strangers" supposedly lurked around the corner or on the other side of town, but they didn't exist in children's bedrooms or the family room via Internet chat rooms and easily accessible pornographic websites. Video games such as *Grand Theft Auto* had not been invented, and the media weren't as notorious about delivering messages that encourage unhealthy behaviors. In the past, children's sporting events weren't scheduled every day of the week and from morning to late evening on weekends, thereby putting tremendous pressures on families and their values. Today many role models are tarnished, unethical behavior is commonplace, and new opportunities to develop and engage in negative behaviors abound. More than ever, students are faced with uncertainty in their daily lives and in their futures, and many feel a sense of insecurity, disenfranchisement, disillusionment, and even fear. For all of these reasons, SEL is perhaps more important than ever as an essential component of school reform (Zins, Walberg, & Weissberg, 2004).

ACTIONS FOR PREVENTION AND PROMOTION

Why Students Should Be Taught SEL

Developing social-emotional competence is a key to success in school and in life. We know that emotions affect how and what we learn, that caring relationships provide the foundation for lasting learning, and that important SEL skills and knowledge can be taught. Research shows that SEL has positive effects on academic performance, benefits physical health, improves citizenship, is demanded by employers, is essential for lifelong success, and reduces the risk of maladjustment, failed relationships, interpersonal violence, substance abuse, and unhappiness (Elias et al., 1997; Zins, Weissberg et al., 2004).

Many of today's prevention and promotion initiatives are fragmented, which does not contribute to their

collective effectiveness. Schools nationally implement a median of 14 practices (among them, metal detectors, advisory periods, recreational activities, architectural features of the school, school change management practices, and informational posters and brochures) to prevent problem behavior and promote safe environments (Gottfredson & Gottfredson, 2001), so it is easy to understand why such efforts may not be coordinated. The result is lost opportunities to reinforce skills across programs and activities, as well as competition for resources. However, SEL can serve as the organizing framework for a broad array of prevention and promotion efforts (Elias et al., 1997).

Key Components of Effective SEL

Five key competencies are taught, practiced, and reinforced through SEL programming (CASEL, 2003):

- *Self-awareness*—Identification and recognition of one's own emotions, recognition of strengths in self and others, sense of self-efficacy, and self-confidence.
- *Social awareness*—Empathy, respect for others, and perspective taking.
- *Responsible decision making*—Evaluation and reflection, and personal and ethical responsibility.
- *Self-management*—Impulse control, stress management, persistence, goal setting, and motivation.
- *Relationship skills*—Cooperation, help seeking and providing, and communication.

As noted earlier, these competencies are taught most effectively within caring, supportive, and well-managed learning environments. Development of autonomy, self-discipline, and ethics is more likely in environments in which mutual respect, cooperation, caring, and decision making are the norm (Bear, 2005). Such contexts are structured in ways that encourage students to explore and try new learning activities, provide them with easily accessible opportunities to address their personal needs and problems, and support them in establishing positive relationships with peers and adults. As a result, students feel safe and secure and are not fearful of making mistakes. Ultimately, a reciprocal relationship exists between SEL skills and school climate. A positive school environment promotes SEL, and SEL facilitates a supportive climate. Because social, emotional, and academic growth are interdependent, the result is synergistic progress in all of these areas.

A comprehensive list of 37 guidelines for developing SEL can be found in *Promoting Social and*

Table 1 *Outline of Effective Social and Emotional Learning Instruction*

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- Based on theory and research and carefully planned
 - Interactively teaches SEL skills for applications to daily life
 - Builds connections to school through caring, engaging classroom and school practices
 - Promotes developmentally and culturally appropriate instruction
 - Leads to coordinated, integrated, and unified programming linked to academic outcomes
 - Enhances school performance by addressing emotional and social dimensions of learning by engaging and interactive methods
 - Involves school–family–community partnerships
 - Establishes organizational supports and policies that foster success
 - Provides high-quality staff development and support
 - Addresses key implementation and sustainability factors, including continuous improvement, outcomes evaluation, and dissemination factors
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Note. Based on *Promoting Social and Emotional Learning: Guidelines for Educators*, by M. J. Elias et al., 1997, Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development; and *Safe and Sound: An Educational Leader's Guide to Evidence-Based Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Programs*, by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2003, Chicago: Author.

Emotional Learning: Guidelines for Educators (Elias et al., 1997). These guidelines, which are summarized in 10 major points in Table 1, describe in detail what effective SEL instruction entails. For example, it must be systematic, provided over multiple years, integrated with the academic curriculum, and supported by school–family–community partnerships and a caring supportive environment. In addition, nine useful guidelines specific to school climate, which were developed by the Ohio Department of Education, are presented in Table 2.

SEL programming should be approached from a risk and resilience perspective. In other words, children may acquire risk processes, such as school failure, involvement with antisocial peers, or family poverty, that make it more likely that they will develop problem behaviors. The more risk processes they have, the higher their relative risk, although having risk processes does not guarantee that a student will develop problems, and many of them do not. On the other hand, protective mechanisms or development of competencies—such as bonding to school, learning to consider the perspectives of others, or possessing adequate social decision-making skills—keep children from harm's way or buffer them from the negative effects,

Table 2 *Ohio Guidelines for School Climate*

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- Guideline 1.* Operational principles for local schools that are grounded in best practices for academic achievement and are espoused by the community will produce effective systems.
- Guideline 2.* School–community partnerships enable the provision of comprehensive services for students and staff.
- Guideline 3.* Regular, thorough assessment and evaluation result in continuous improvement.
- Guideline 4.* High-quality staff development and administrative support lead to effective program implementation.
- Guideline 5.* Addressing real and perceived threats to safety and security enables students to focus on learning and teachers to focus on instruction.
- Guideline 6.* A student's sense of belonging in the classroom encourages classroom participation, positive interactions, and good study habits.
- Guideline 7.* Engagement of parents and families in school–home learning partnerships maximizes the potential for effective instruction and student learning.
- Guideline 8.* Youth engagement in forming school policy and procedures integrates an essential perspective into proposed solutions.
- Guideline 9.* High-quality food service supports improvements in academic performance and behavior.
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Note. From *Ohio Guidelines for School Climate*, by the Ohio Department of Education, 2004, Columbus, OH: Center for Students, Families, and Community.

and thus lead to more successful adaptation. These positive, health-promoting processes may be found within the child and at the family and community levels.

Evidence-Based SEL

Research support. The past two to three decades have seen great progress in educational researchers' and practitioners' knowledge of how to prevent social–emotional and other problems, and in how to promote competence and health-enhancing behaviors. A growing number of programs, strategies, and techniques are available for promoting healthy development and preventing negative outcomes, and a stronger empirical base has emerged in the SEL field (Greenberg et al., 2003). Thus, a number of evidence-based SEL curricula and programs are available that lead to outcomes such as the prevention of substance abuse and interpersonal violence and to the promotion of mental health, positive youth development, and academic achievement (e.g., Catalano,

Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 2002; Durlak & Wells, 1997; Gottfredson & Wilson, 2003; Tobler et al., 2000; Zins, Weissberg et al., 2004). Many of the positive outcomes found to be associated with SEL interventions are summarized in Table 3.

Although many research and practice issues still need to be addressed, the empirical investigations behind current SEL evaluation efforts include better study designs, use of manualized and readily replicable interventions, more analyses of longitudinal data leading to a better understanding of the operation of risk and protective processes, and improvements in knowledge of pathways and stages associated with development of maladaptive behaviors (Greenberg, 2004; Mrazek & Haggerty, 1994). Consequently, the quality of the research support for school-based preventive interventions is substantially stronger (i.e., more than 60 randomized controlled trials) than four other areas of educational research (e.g., math education and staff development) examined by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute for Education Sciences (Whitehurst, 2003). A number of organizations have identified, reviewed, and rated evidence-based programs (see Table 4), and a National Registry of Effective Programs and Practices (NREPP; see <http://modelprograms.samhsa.gov>) has been established that includes the category of general substance abuse and treatment programs.

Costs. Evidence shows that effective SEL programs can provide a good return for their costs; that is, the value of their benefits exceeds their costs (Aos, Lieb, Mayfield, Miller, & Pennucci, 2004). For instance, providing the Seattle Social Development Program (Hawkins, Smith, & Catalano, 2004) costs \$4,590 per student served annually, but its benefits were \$14,426, or \$3.14 per dollar spent per student. Likewise, the Child Development Project (now known as Caring School Community; Schaps, Battistich, & Solomon, 2004) has benefits of \$28.42 for each dollar spent, and Life Skills Training (Botvin, 1998, 2002) has \$25.61 in benefits. Examples of demonstrated benefits include improved educational outcomes (e.g., test scores, graduation rates), reduced crime, lowered substance abuse, and decreased teen suicide attempts. However, such programs do not result in positive benefits across the board, as some generate more costs than benefits. For example, Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E.) costs \$99 per student served but resulted in no benefit according to the criteria used (Aos et al., 2004). As with other areas of education, SEL programs must be examined carefully before being adopted.

Table 3 *Examples of SEL Outcomes Related to Success in School and Life*

Attitudes

- Higher sense of self-efficacy
- Better sense of community (bonding) and view of school as caring
- Stronger commitment to democratic values
- More positive attitudes toward school and learning
- Improved ethical attitudes and values
- Higher academic motivation and educational aspirations
- Greater trust and respect for teachers
- Improved coping with school stressors
- Increased understanding of consequences of behavior

Behaviors

- More prosocial behavior
- Fewer absences and suspensions; maintained or improved attendance
- More likely to work out own way of learning
- Reductions in aggression, disruptions, and interpersonal violence
- Fewer hostile negotiations, lower rate of conduct problems, better conflict resolution skills
- More classroom participation and higher engagement
- Greater effort to achieve, more frequent reading outside of school
- Better transitions
- Less drug, tobacco, and alcohol use and delinquent behavior
- Decreases in sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS, suicide
- More involvement in positive activities (e.g., sports)

Performance

- Improved math, language arts, and social studies skills
 - Increases in achievement over time (elementary to middle school)
 - Higher achievement test scores and no decreases in scores
 - More progress in phonological awareness
 - Improved learning-to-learn skill
 - Better problem solving and planning
 - Improved nonverbal reasoning
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Note. Reprinted from "Facilitating Success in School and in Life Through Social and Emotional Learning," by J. E. Zins, M. J. Elias, and M. T. Greenberg, 2003, *Perspectives in Education*, 21(4), pp. 59–60. Copyright 2003 by *Perspectives in Education*. Reprinted with permission. See also Consortium on the School-Based Promotion of Social Competence (1994); Elias et al., (1997); Fredericks (2003); U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2002); and Wilson, Gottfredson, & Najaka (2001).

Table 4 *Examples of Effective Social and Emotional Learning Programs*

Program	Ratings Organization				
	Center for Substance Abuse Prevention	Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning	National Institute on Drug Abuse	Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention	U.S. Department of Education
Al's Pals: Kids Making Healthy Choices	Model				Promising
Caring School Community		Select	Effective		Promising
I Can Problem Solve	Promising	Select		Promising	Promising
Life Skills Training	Model		Effective	Blueprints Model	Exemplary
Lions-Quest Skills	Model	Select			Promising
Michigan Model for Comprehensive School Health Education		Select			Promising
Olweus Bullying Prevention	Model			Blueprints Model	
Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies	Effective	Select		Blueprints Model	Promising
Project Achieve	Model	Select			
Project Northland	Model			Promising	Exemplary
Second Step: A Violence Prevention Curriculum	Model	Select			Exemplary
Resolving Conflicts Creatively Program		Select			
Social Problem Solving/Social Decision Making	Promising	Select			Promising

Note. These ratings are subject to change as programs are revised and reassessed.

Use. Evidence-based practices are not used as widely and effectively as they could be (Biglan, Mrazek, Carnine, & Flay, 2003), and we do not know enough about how to influence teachers, educational leaders,

and schools to adopt and maintain such practices (Glasgow, Vogt, & Boles, 1999). As discussed later, the manner in which social-emotional instruction is delivered is also important (e.g., with fidelity to how it was

planned), and we need to learn more about what reinforces the adoption of, adherence to, and sustainability of these interventions (Elias, Zins, Graczyk, & Weissberg, 2003). Significant “person power” issues also exist; far fewer personnel have been trained in SEL approaches than are needed for widespread dissemination. Although some progress is being made in making SEL part of the preparation of professionals such as school psychologists, counselors, and educators, efforts in these directions must be more extensive if they are to touch the many children who need them (Zins, 2001).

The Implementation Process

This section contains a brief overview of key implementation issues. The following are examples of activities for school psychologists and other support staff members who wish to be involved in implementation efforts (these are discussed in more detail in Elias et al., 2003):

- *Conduct school and community risk and needs assessments for program planning.* Determine the need and readiness for social–emotional programming. Identify specific issues that could be addressed and examine what already is in place.
- *Consult with school personnel.* Assist in exploring, adopting, implementing, and continuing SEL programming. Support educational leaders who are involved in implementing and integrating SEL into the school culture and organizational routines.
- *Be a champion for SEL.* Be a leader and promote the case for SEL instruction. Help create a safe, caring learning environment at school, in the home, and in extracurricular activities.
- *Promote organizational support.* Help develop policies and practices that will enhance SEL so that adequate support and resources are devoted to these efforts. Encourage the adoption of SEL in district curriculum standards.
- *Act as a liaison to coordinate and integrate school–family–community SEL efforts.* Work with parents and community members to ensure continuity and coordination of prevention messages and services, and to avoid redundancy and conflicts over resources.
- *Help ensure maintenance and sustainability.* Examine the integrity with which SEL programs are adopted and monitor the adaptations that occur to promote high quality. Ensure that support and resources will continue to be devoted to these efforts.
- *Engage in program monitoring and evaluation services.* Assess the extent and quality of SEL program implementation using identified benchmarks, and evaluate formatively and summatively whether goals are attained.

Before examining more specific implementation issues, we must express two caveats. First, the field is a long way from systematically preparing school-based professionals to engage in the activities that make up SEL programs. Even with qualified personnel, the process of implementation takes time. It is common for adoption and institutionalization to take 3 to 5 years, so expectations about outcomes must be tempered based on that reality (Elias et al., 1997; Lippitt, Langseth, & Mossop, 1985).

Readiness and sanction. To begin, how does a school know if it is ready to devote more efforts and resources to SEL? And if it is ready to adopt specific programming? The school will have many considerations, but among the first is to understand its organizational motivations and the need for change, as well as the outcomes it hopes to achieve. A first step is to perform an organizational analysis, involving interviews, observations, questionnaires, rating scales, examination of permanent products and records, and so forth, that targets staff members, students, parents, and community members. The data collected will help the participants understand issues such as organizational climate and health, communication processes, boundaries, roles, leadership styles, and external influences. Of particular importance at this early stage is an understanding of current related efforts and how new programming might help to better meet identified needs by either supplementing or replacing what is being done (Lippitt et al., 1985; Zins & Illback, 1993).

Once participants determine the school’s readiness, they should identify program goals and reach consensus about which goals to address. In addition, sanction for implementation must be gained at the administrative, staff, and parent–community levels. Having champions of the cause within the organization is important, but beyond those individuals the position taken by educational leaders such as principals is critical to ensuring sufficient support for role changes, ongoing staff development and coaching, scheduling, program monitoring and evaluation, and resource allocation. Ongoing staff development and coaching, for instance, are likely to lead to high-quality programming, fidelity, and sustainability.

Programming. Among the challenges at this point is to select appropriate evidence-based programming from the myriad of potential approaches. Fortunately, several program reviews are available that include ratings of effectiveness. Examples of overall ratings of several selected programs are shown in Table 4. These reviews help promote standards for quality SEL programming and enable educators to compare and select appropriate programs, based on the match between local needs and program effectiveness, goals, intervention techniques, strengths and limitations, costs, and so forth.

An excellent resource for ratings is *Safe and Sound: An Educational Leader's Guide to Evidence-Based Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Programs* (CASEL, 2003). The guide contains reviews and comparisons of 80 programs across 17 variables of interest, including the five key SEL skills listed earlier. To be included in the review, programming had to be school based and pertain to general education; consist of multiyear, sequenced instruction or an organizational structure to promote lessons beyond the first year; be systematic and comprehensive; have at least eight lessons in one program year; and be nationally available. The programs were rated on outcome effectiveness; how well the five key SEL skills are addressed; the availability of student assessment measures; if it includes support for school-wide, family, and community involvement; and whether professional development is offered. Of this group, 21 were identified as *select* because they met CASEL standards for high-quality SEL instruction, ongoing professional development support, and evidence of effectiveness based on well-designed evaluations. Within the programs that included methods to promote the integration of SEL with academic curricula and teaching practices, an impressive 83% produced academic gains.

The core, active elements of the intervention (i.e., specifically what will be implemented; what are negotiable versus non-negotiable aspects of program integrity; how can differences compared with current practices, systems, and values be resolved) must be well understood by those seeking to adopt a program. Visiting a site to see the program operating, or talking with current users, usually provides insights that cannot be obtained elsewhere. Furthermore, all programs have limitations; schools must be wary of programs that are oversold by overzealous champions who build unwarranted expectations for them. Rather, by being aware of the strengths and limits of programs, and being able to predict many roadblocks and sources of resistance, schools often can learn to manage and address these problems (e.g., resistance, fear of failure,

changing roles, scaling-up too rapidly, more ecological intrusion that results in unanticipated challenges) so that implementation may proceed more smoothly.

Ownership. Programs have associated values that must be supported by and compatible with relevant school policies, practices, and goals if they are to succeed. Buy-in from constituencies at different organizational levels, including parents and the community, must be ascertained and their commitment established. School leadership and high-status individuals need to be involved early in the implementation process, and ultimately, ownership needs to be created among all constituencies.

Roles and functions of stakeholders may be altered, but SEL program planners should recognize that the same job can be done in different ways. For instance, school psychologists do not have to spend the majority of their time conducting psychoeducational assessments and developing individual interventions. Instead, they may focus more energy on systems change by implementing SEL programs, which may decrease the press for direct services (Zins, 2001). Parents too can be true partners in deciding how SEL programming is delivered to their children, rather than being uninvolved or passive recipients.

Another implementation challenge is dealing with competing agendas. Elements of the organization may have different priorities, but consensus must be achieved to avoid battles over resources and direction of efforts, because such competition increases fragmentation and marginalization. The organization should review potential areas of conflict and fragmentation, such as for resources, roles of staff, boundaries, time allocation, priorities, and overlap (Novick, Kress, & Elias, 2002). Likewise, when the staff overspecializes or focuses too much on one area, such as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports or conflict resolution, rather than being broad based, too much energy may inadvertently be devoted to providing services rather than empowering individuals within the school.

Application. Numerous opportunities exist for the application of SEL concepts, such as the following (see Zins, Weissberg et al., 2004):

- Adopt specific SEL curricula (e.g., Second Step program).
- Infuse SEL activities into regular academic curricula (e.g., literacy, history).

- Develop supportive, caring learning environments (e.g., improve school climate).
- Alter instructional processes (e.g., cooperative learning).
- Reinforce SEL skills as part of the informal curriculum (e.g., lunch, playground).
- Promote school–family–community partnerships.
- Engage students actively and experientially in the learning process (e.g., service learning).
- Reflect SEL in behavior management and discipline practices and policies.
- Integrate SEL methods into extracurricular activities (e.g., sports).

One of the more common concerns about adopting SEL programming is how it will fit into an already packed school day. As seen in the list above, the options require a range of adaptations, from relatively minor to more substantial changes in the school ecology. Introducing a specific SEL curriculum may be difficult in some schools, but using SEL principles to guide school discipline and behavior management practices may be less intrusive to organizational routines and resources. The goal is to infuse SEL into ongoing activities and program delivery systems in schools and communities to make the intervention sustainable. Likewise, organizational processes and structures must be established to ensure high-quality implementation and to promote sustainability (Greenberg, 2004). Without such safeguards, programs can easily drift from what was planned and intended, and core program elements inadvertently may be omitted because of time concerns. Such deviations from the program may affect outcomes. Often, the core, active elements of the intervention are not clear, so practitioners, researchers, and program developers must work together to identify them. Fortunately, many schools have successfully navigated these dilemmas and can serve as models for organizations embarking on this work (Elias, Arnold, & Hussey, 2002; Elias et al., 1997; Lantieri, 2002).

The issue of adaptation versus fidelity must be addressed, as there is evidence that it is related to program outcomes. Fidelity to program procedures has been found to lead to better outcomes; conversely, poor fidelity results in decreased effectiveness (Elliott & Mihalic, 2004). For example, Botvin, Baker, Dusenbury, Botvin, and Diaz (1995) found that the strongest outcomes with Life Skills Training (Botvin, 1998, 2002) occurred with students who received a more complete version of the intervention. Because implementing a program will

almost always involve making adaptations, even with highly structured, manualized interventions, one way to view this issue is to examine the quality and nature of the changes. Support staff members and classroom teachers should work together to anticipate and plan for modifications while they work to ensure that core program elements are maintained. Some adaptations are beneficial in terms of improving outcomes and facilitating ownership (and thus durability), whereas others harm program integrity. Furthermore, programs need to be tailored culturally to ethnic and racial minority children to maximize the programs' effectiveness (Botvin, 2004). In other words, the better the cultural fit is, the more likely that buy-in and perceptions of the program's relevance will occur.

Finally, systems to support SEL must be integrated across levels of prevention/promotion and treatment services (e.g., universal to indicated prevention and treatment (Adelman & Taylor, 2000), across student developmental levels, and across school, family, and community systems, as shown in Figure 1. The fragmentation and marginalization that characterize the educational and mental health systems today largely result from a lack of coordination and integration (Illback, Cobb, & Joseph, 1997); however, the systemwide adoption of SEL can reduce fragmentation and be a unifying conceptual scheme (Elias et al., 1997, 2003).

Standards and Accountability

More attention should be devoted to state department of education instructional standards that include teaching SEL to further institutionalize and sustain such efforts. For example, in 2003 Illinois passed the Children's Mental Health Act (Public Act 93-0495) in which social and emotional development are defined as integral to schools' mission and essential to students' academic readiness and school success. The act is intended to ensure that schools incorporate the following:

- Regard social and emotional development as integral to their mission and a critical component of student academic readiness and school success.
- Take concrete steps to address their students' social and emotional development.
- Have the flexibility to include social and emotional learning in their school improvement plans.
- Develop a policy for incorporating social and emotional development into the district's educational program, including assessing social and emotional skills.

- Develop a policy for responding to children with social, emotional, or mental health problems that affect learning.

Social and emotional development standards are now included as part of the Illinois Learning Standards, which means that children's social-emotional development must be addressed in the curriculum. Consequently, all students in the state receive such instruction. One result of the Illinois legislation is that it has made paramount the need to measure social-emotional skills because every district must have a policy for incorporating social-emotional development into the district's educational program. That policy includes not only teaching and assessing SEL for all students, but also responding to children who have social, emotional, or mental health problems that affect their learning. Likewise, it requires schools to be accountable for conducting valid and reliable assessments of social-emotional, academic, and health-related outcomes, as well as of school climate, based on input obtained from multiple constituencies (e.g., students, parents, teachers, and community members).

Thus, SEL assessment is one area in need of further development and may be of special interest to many school psychologists. For purposes of accountability and acceptability, we need to determine that SEL has value-added outcomes for student learning, and we need to be able to assess the quality of the SEL instruction that occurs in the classroom. While some school psychologists are involved in developing measures, others could examine indicators of competence, health, and the like, to see how well they align with SEL constructs. There is no reason to delay making SEL part of standard assessment processes using the best measures available.

SUMMARY

Students today must be prepared not only to pass tests at school but also to pass the tests of life. Social-emotional competence and academic achievement are highly related, and effective schools are focusing efforts on integrated, coordinated instruction in both areas to maximize students' potential to succeed in school and throughout their lives. A growing body of research demonstrates that evidence-based SEL interventions are associated with academic achievement, health, and citizenship, so a major challenge for schools is how to make SEL a core element of the curriculum and how to implement relevant

programming with fidelity and in ways that are sustainable. Tremendous opportunities exist for school psychologists to assist schools in these endeavors, and additional training opportunities must be made available to prepare them for such roles.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Books and Other Printed Material

Elias, M. J., Zins, J. E., Weissberg, R. P., Frey, K. S., Greenberg, M. T., Haynes, N. M., Kessler, R., Schwab-Stone, M. E., & Shriver, T. P. (1997). *Promoting social and emotional learning: Guidelines for educators*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

The authors define the field of social and emotional learning. They draw upon the most recent scientific studies, the best theories, site visits carried out around the country, and their own extensive experiences to describe effective approaches to SEL. The discussion is framed by 39 concise guidelines for promoting SEL.

Greenberg, M. T., Weissberg, R. P., O'Brien, M. U., Zins, J. E., Fredericks, L., Resnik, H., & Elias, M. J. (2003). Enhancing school-based prevention and youth development through coordinated social and emotional learning. *American Psychologist*, 58, 466–474.

In this article the authors make the case for the widespread implementation of beneficial prevention programming. They advocate for research-based, comprehensive school reform models that improve social, health, and academic outcomes; school policies that demand accountability for fostering children's overall development; professional development related to helping educators implement programs effectively; and ongoing monitoring and evaluation to guide school improvement.

Zins, J. E., Weissberg, R. P., Wang, M. C., & Walberg, H. J. (Eds.). (2004). *Building academic success on social and emotional learning: What does the research say?* New York: Teachers College Press.

This comprehensive book contains a concise review of the field of social and emotional learning (SEL), with a specific examination of its effects on academic achievement and school success. Relevant outcomes from a number of the best SEL programs nationally are reviewed, leading the editors to conclude that

“there is a growing body of scientifically based research supporting the strong impact that enhanced social and emotional behaviors can have on success in school and ultimately in life” (p. 19).

Websites

<http://www.casel.org>

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) is a major national organization whose mission is to enhance children’s success in school and in life by promoting coordinated, evidence-based social, emotional, and academic learning as an essential part of education from preschool through high school. CASEL’s three primary goals are to advance the science of SEL; expand coordinated, evidence-based practice; and build a sustainable and collaborative organization to accomplish its mission.

<http://www.csee.net>

The Center for Social and Emotional Education (CSEE) is an educational and professional development organization dedicated to supporting effective social–emotional learning, teaching, and leadership in K–12 schools. It integrates research and best practices in education, including risk prevention, health promotion, mental health, effective citizenry, character education, and social–emotional learning, to promote students’ ability to learn and develop in healthy ways.

<http://www.samhsa.gov>

The mission of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, is to build resilience and facilitate recovery for people with or at risk for substance abuse problems and mental illness. Its vision is a life in the community for everyone, and it supports a variety of school-based prevention efforts.

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu>

The mission of the UCLA School Mental Health Project (SMHP) is to improve outcomes for young people by enhancing the field of mental health in schools. It connects mental health and psychosocial concerns with school reform and improvement by integrating health and related concerns into a broad perspective that includes addressing barriers to learning and promoting healthy development.

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